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ABSTRACT

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is similar to the Disadvantaged Schools Program of Australia in some ways and distinctively different in others. This comparison of the two programs by an Australian educator points out the similarities and differences in program purpose, regulation, funding targets, and local control. Both programs provide federal funds to schools operated and funded primarily at the state level, and both are aimed at improving schooling in poorer communities. The extent of financial inequality among American districts, however, prevents the American program from bringing low income districts up to the national average, whereas the Australian program allows schools with above average needs to receive funding above the generally equal level already provided. The American program has more stringent regulations, is targeted at individual low-achieving students in low income districts, and establishes specific standards for achievement, particularly in basic skills areas. The Australian program is targeted at schools and permits local authorities to determine the most effective use of resources. The author suggests that the programs serve different social functions and that American conditions have so changed that a program like Australia's might now prove more appropriate. (PGD)

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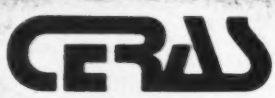

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TITLE I AND THE AUSTRALIAN DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS PROGRAM

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TITLE I AND THE AUSTRALIAN DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the United States and the Disadvantaged Schools Program in Australia are both nationally funded programs aimed at improving schooling in poorer communities. Both occur in a federal political structure where schooling is operated and substantially funded at sub-national level. This paper is an impressionistic response to a three weeks' study tour of the United States funded by the Ford Foundation through the U.S. Australia Project which enabled me, as a person associated with the Australian program, to see something of the operation of Title I at first hand in California and to talk with people at national and state level about the program. Clearly, my knowledge of the two programs is not of comparable depth, but the visit did occasion some reflections about programs such as Title I and the Disadvantaged Schools Program which may be of general interest.

A fundamental difference between the two programs is that each enters a different initial school funding situation. In the United States, because, on average nearly half of the funds for public schools is raised from local property taxes, there are great disparities in the basic resources schools have. Within a single state, expenditure may range from $600 to $2600 per student according to the district in which the child lives. Even in California, which has made more strenuous efforts than have most states to equalise expenditure across schools and districts, high spending districts still spend more than twice as much per pupil tha do low spending ones. On average, some 8 per cent of total expendit on schools comes from federal sources, all of it in special purpose grants, and most of it through Title I, which, at $2billion a year is by far the largest federal program. Although these funds are distributed among states and districts according to the number of low income families in them, they do not bring resources in low

spending districts even to the national average, let alone to the levels existing in more affluent districts. This situation in many ways blunts the point of Title I, which continues to be seen by many as a weak but politically acceptable move towards national equalisation of school resources rather than as a means of getting more than average resources into schools which may be expected to have greater than average needs.

The Disadvantaged Schools Program, on the other hand, does bring greater than average resources into such schools, and is in this sense a program of positive discrimination in a way which the American program isn't. The six states, which operate and substantially fund the public systems of education attended by four fifths of all students have traditionally followed a policy of providing on a roughly equal basis for schools of comparable size. Minor differences in average per pupil expenditure among states have largely been overcome by federal general purpose grants.

A brief description of the aims and methods of operation of the two programs will be useful as a basis for the ensuing discussion, since few readers will be equally familiar with both. Title I began as part of the Johnson era War on Poverty. It was based on the idea that if the competitive position of children from poorer families could be improved through more successful schooling their future economic prospects would be improved also. Such children could be given a better chance of keeping up with their peers in learning if they were given special assistance in the early formative years. According to legislation authorising it, Title I has three objectives. The first is the direction of funds to schools and districts serving poorer populations. The significance in the American scene of this objective has already been indicated. The other two objectives are concerned with in-school action - to fund special services for low achieving children in the poorest schools and to contribute to the cognitive, emotional, social or physical development of participating students.

Thus, although the school derives its eligibility for funds from the number of low income families served by it, once the funds reach the school they may only be spent on low achievers, who are not necessarily from low income families.

The tightening up of federal requirements since 1974 has concentrated funds in poorer schools and districts. They are not so strongly concentrated as they would be if the distribution of funds did not also include incentive payments designed to encourage higher local school spending, or if national definition of eligibility were uniformly followed by state authorities, who have power to vary the national poverty levels according to other income related criteria in their division of funds among districts. Within schools, stringent federal regulation does also now ensure the concentration on low achieving students of services funded. But of recent years, and largely as a result of the detailed nature of federal regulation, the services funded are now effectivel confined to supplementary instruction in the basic skills of reading language arts and mathematics. The greater part of this instruction is given on a pull-out or withdrawal basis, some 77 per cent of reading assistance being given in such situations and 44 per cent of special instruction in math. Although it is theoretically possible to use funds for the broader cognitive and developmental aims mentioned in legislation and emphasised in federal statements about the program, only four per cent of funds across the country are now spent on ancillary services of a welfare or general developmental nature.

"Educational disadvantage" is defined within eligible schools as a score below the median on standardised basic skills tests. The tests are not uniform throughout the country and since the funds are insufficient to provide services for all students within eligible schools who fall below whatever median is used, the target population within schools is variously defined by districts. It is defined by cut-off scores and levels of schooling,

with a strong concentration on the early years. Eighty per cent of Title I funds are spent on special services for years K through three and some two thirds of all elementary schools participate in the program.

Committees of advice, a majority of whose members must be parents of participating students, are mandatory at both district and school level and the degree of information about the program's intentions and methods of operation which are made available both to these parents and to the public in general is indicative of the seriousness of intent which marks it on every side. Districts and schools must submit a plan of operation, and evaluation reports which hinge strongly on scores improvement. A national dissemination program vets the success claims of programs chosen as models for national dissemination.

The Australian program began in 1974. It was, in financial terms, a minor part of expanded federal funding for public and non-public schools instituted by the first national Labor Government in 23 years on the advice of the Interim Committee for the Schools Commission which it set up. The program runs at about $21m a year and has since 1977 been supplemented by a smaller ($5m) Disadvantaged Country Areas Program which will be excluded from this discussion, since it has a somewhat different rationale and method of operation. The Disadvantaged Schools Program constitutes only some 3 per cent of all federal assistance to schools, the great bulk of which goes in general assistance grants. It is administrated through the Schools Commission, a statutory federal body which succeeded the Interim Committee and which has the task of advising the federal government on the levels and directions of national school funding and of administering the progr through which national funds flow to schools and school systems.

The general rationale for the program is that, to the degree that populations are segregated geographically by socio-economic level, some schools have a greater than average need for

resources because of the concentration in them of students whose social background characteristics are associated with low average performance and with a need for wider than average school services. It was not believed that a marginal increase in resources would of themselves greatly affect the quality and nature of the services offered to students (Disadvantaged Schools Program funds amount, on average, to only some $50 per pupil, a 5% increment on average running costs). Since over a hundred years of compulsory schooling in schools of roughly equal resource use had failed to reduce the differences in school outcomes among social groups, and the way to do this was unknown, it was decided to set up the program in a way which encouraged locally designed experimentation and the commitment of people in the school communities concerned to their own improved schooling.

The objectives of the program are formulated in very broad terms - improved learning, more meaningful and enjoyable schooling and improved school/community relationships. Funds are nationally distributed among public and non-government school systems on the basis of an index of disadvantage which ranked the populations of school catchment areas, using 1971 census data, according to the inter-correlation of 38 social variables having a negative association with school success and with educational participation beyond compulsory years. Systems then declare a list of eligible schools whose number is limited by total enrolment figures federally set. In doing so, most use a simplified list of social criteria in which father's occupation, dependence on welfare or income related benefits, and ethnic background are central. One system combines school achievement scores with these social criteria to produce a ranking of schools. These objective measures are supplemented by the judgements of people who know the schools well. The Australian program is confined to a more limited proportion of schools than is the American, since it uses concentration of students having particular background characteristi.

rather than their absolute number as the test for eligibility. Some 12 per cent of primary and secondary schools and (by coincidence) a similar proportion of students is covered.

It is fundamentally different from Title I in being a whole school program in which action funded is not confined to selected students within a school. Schools declared eligible do not have an automatic entitlement to extra funds, although in practice it is unusual for a school declared eligible to receive none. Funds are made available according to the quality of proposal for action worked out at school level. These proposals must be generally consistent with the broad aims of the program and must be formulated on the basis of a study of the needs of the community served. As each school sets its own objectives for improvement, action is evaluated by it in terms of those objectives and with the intention that, at each successive period of funding, the quality of action proposed will be improved in the light of experience, both in the school itself and in other schools of the program.

Systems require evidence that there has been participation by teachers and parents in the analysis of the existing situation and in the formulation of the proposals for improvement. These proposals are ajudicated by area or central committees (depending on the size of the system), composed of administrators and elected or appointed teachers and parents. They also often include academics and people drawn from education-associated agencies, such as welfare and health.

As a consequence of these procedures, and of the breadth of program aims, action funded varies widely. It may be centred directly on the improvement of basic skills or on action indirectly designed to improve them. It may range through excursions and camps to brass bands and creative drama. It may consist of curriculum adaptation designed to make better

connections between the learning program and life in the community; it may have a welfare emphasis or be a response to ethnic variety; it may set out to counter sex stereotyping or to improve the physical strength and grace of students or their social confidence and competence. Cross age tutoring and community experience programs, including work experience, may be part of it, or it may concentrate primarily on participation of parents in the educational process.

In general, it could be said that the American program is primarily a direct attack on low formal achievement among designated students within schools whose eligibility is determined by the number of low income families served. The Australian program operates more like the California School Improvement Program than like Title I. Confined to school selected for the concentration of families of low socio-economic status, it seeks the means to improved schooling in neighbourhoods where schools have in the past registered least success, without presuming either that the nature of the problem or the attack on it can uniformly be defined. The hope is that formal learning will improve, that the experience of schooling will be more satisfying, and that schooling will be changed to interact more positively with the life experience of students and their communities in ways which enhance students' capacity to manage their own lives.

The Federal Hand

When one considers the scale of Title I, operating through State Education Authorities and 14,000 participating districts to schools, it is scarcely surprising that the amount of regulation considered necessary to achieve local compliance with the federal intent is immeasurably greater than is the case in the Australian program, which operates through six public and six non-public school systems and over some thousand schools.

It is undoubtedly the case that federal programs are most securely based when they express priorities shared down the line to the point of action. This coincidence is more difficult to achieve in programs expressing social priorities, which by their nature are controversial, than it is when federal funding merely supports or enables the extension of some educational service which everybody desires if someone else will pay for it. Library programs, teacher development programs and career education programs fall under this latter heading. Title I and the Disadvantaged Schools Program, on the other hand, express social priorities. Educators have long been used to viewing educational processes and outcomes within a perspective of individual difference which strings out all students along a limited number of standard dimensions. Both Title I and the Disadvantaged Schools Program assert a complementary social perspective. The Disadvantaged Schools Program does this more strongly than does Title I, because in it the social indicators are not seen simply as proxies for low achievement, but also as indicators of the kind of changes in institutional orientation required if schools are to serve poorer communities more effectively

It seems to be well established that without the extensive federal regulation which has been built up, many State authorities in the U.S. would have used Title I funds as general aid. The volume of regulation required to ensure the federal intent is now so great that compliance has become almost an end in itself. When we consider that Title I, although the largest, is only one of a large number of federal and state programs targeted on a pre-defined group of students within the schools, the institutional fragmentatio resulting from separate and close regulation of each of these sets of funds is not difficult to imagine. Beyond the regulations governing the distribution of Title I funds among districts and schools are a whole host of others, designed to ensure that funds are spent only on the targetted students, that parent advisory groups exist, that programs are planned, reported on and assessed, that action is of sufficient intensity to have a reasonable prospect

of success, that Title I funds are not used to supplant funds from other sources, but supplement what is made available to all students, equally across all schools in the district. This plethora of regulations largely dictates the type of action taken. It is easier to demonstrate that you are "in compliance" if everything funded under Title I is confined to a pull-out situation separate from the regular school program. In California, the existence of state funded programs for the disadvantaged allows the pullout arrangement, which is not regarded as the only or necessarily the best method of attack on improved basic skills, to be avoided if people so desire. Many other states have similarly funded state programs which presumably also make it difficult to identify precisely what is state and federally funded in the special support services offered to low achievers. Yet, pull-out, even in California, seems to be the rule rather than the exception.

There is a minimum of federal regulation in the Australian program. Schools must be declared in order to be able to participate, but in public systems it is the State rather than the federal minister who makes that declaration. There is federal regulation of the maximum number of enrolments covered and a requirement that the funds be spent only in declared disadvantaged schools. The Schools Commission has relied on indirect means to get the processes of the program operating in the way it intended. In its periodical reports to the national parliament it outlines intentions, points up weaknesses and suggests particular emphases. It annually issues Guidelines for the program, which do not have the force of law, but which carry considerable influence, particular as concerned pressure groups are able to point to them as the way the program should run. It took several years in some systems for the processes to become fully operative. In others they were taken up with enthusiasm from the beginning of the program. The co-ordinators of the program in the various systems meet periodically to share experiences and problems. There have been occasional more widely representative national conferences. Annual reporting

by the systems according to an agreed format has recently been established. Within systems considerable in-service and analysis of experience takes place and consultants are employed to assist schools in the formulation and evaluation of action. There is a small scale national dissemination program. In general, the approach has been that the program is a mutual learning experience, in which people learn from the analysis of their own practice and exposure to what others are doing.

There are, however, attendant weaknesses in the Disadvantaged Schools Program. Both systems and schools are nervous of outside scrutiny, beyond that which committee examination of proposals provides. Hence, a disciplined documentation of the outcomes of particular types of action, which could at least eliminate approaches which had been widely tried and generally found ineffective, is slow to develop. Much effort over the 6 years of the program has gone into establishing the processes of collectiv school appraisal and forward planning. The stage has now been reached where more positive guides to curriculum development are widely seen to be needed. It is accepted that there are no existing blueprints relating formal learning to real world tasks experiences and expectations, so that developments will be slow and uneven, and results long-term. This, however, does not preclude the possibility of setting out some general principles which go beyond descriptions of particular action. The need for this is now evident, particularly at secondary level, where there is in many places resistance to the idea of using marginal funds to improve the effectiveness for students of <u>all</u> resource application in the school - especially, perhaps, where that lever is also seen to be unwelcome federal intervention in systems.

There is a sense in which both Title I and the Disadvantaged Schools Program are now coming up against a similar kind of limitation. Establishing the procedures and getting funds directed as intended is one thing. Program effectiveness, which

must depend on the quality of educational programs at the school level, is another. In reviewing U.S. federal programs, a Rand Educational Policy Study[1] concludes that "the fundamental principles and purposes of a federal aid program directed to disadvantaged pupils are currently widely, if not universally accepted". The study defines the problem as being no longer one of administrative compliance, but as now turning on "issues of program effectiveness to ensure that the educational goals of Title I are achieved". The nature of useful federal input changes at this point. In the Australian case, the federal input needs now to be about what kinds of curriculum, teacher skills and expectations, and what kinds of community involvement are likely to make schools more effective, relevant and enjoyable for students in low S.E.S. communities, and how, if at all, those specifications would differ from those also applicable to other social groups. The nature of the Australian program is such that detailed specification would be inappropriate, since the emphasis is so strongly on local initiative and commitment. Hopeful directions of change could, however, usefully be drawn from a more clearly articulated theoretical perspective and from experience in the program.

The U.S. program may, on the other hand, require substantial changes in format as it enters the stage of movement from administrative structures to substantive educational strategies. A pattern has been established which presumes that the educational answer to improved outcomes is a concentration on basic skills in isolation from the general program of the school. This has the danger of degenerating into a routinised operation whose effectiveness, even in its own narrow terms, is far from established. The Australian program, with all its vagueness, keeps alive the search for strategies among people in

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1. Michael Timpane (ed), The Federal Interest in School Financing, Ballinger Publishing Company, Camb. Mass. 1978, P. 184

the schools and has generated a considerable professional élan and widened insights. If it is in fact the case, as the Australian program assumes, that people have to perceive problems for themselves and search out their own answers, with the support of research, developmental activities and dissemination, the form of the American program is less encouraging of this than is the Australian. Systems and schools rightly perceive in Australia that the program is theirs, and that federal inputs are supportive rather than directive. The search for program effectiveness is thus self generating.

It is indeed difficult to influence from afar what goes on in schools and classrooms. All situations faced have, moreover, unique aspects arising from what went on before in a particular location, from the strengths, weaknesses and capacity for developmen of the people in the situation and from differences among communitie Uniform recipes for improving schooling, or even of improving precisely defined outcomes are therefore inappropriate, at least at the present stage of our knowledge about learning. They will probably always remain so, to the degree that teaching is an art rather than a science and learning a complex human activity which is not amenable to simple rules of thumb, there is in the end no practicable alternative to relying on the dedication, understanding and skills of teachers for their improvement.

So, in funding designed to influence the educational process, we are looking for patterns which both issue a general challenge about what the funding agency expects, and support teachers in the learning process involved in working through what to do about it. Recent research, notably the Rand Report on Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change (whose findings influenced the design of the California School Improvement Program) supports such an approach. The Rand study suggests that professiona learning is closely linked with the responsibility for designing and testing out action on the school site, within an organisational

framework which acknowledges the importance of the insights of practitioners and the strength derived from mutual support among a work team which has established educational communication among its members and assumed a degree of collective responsibility for what happens to students within the institution as a whole. The professional learning process is continuous, and pursued throughout progressive adaptation of practice, supported by relevant inputs from beyond the school community, including generalised statements of aims and expectations. The Disadvantaged Schools Program comes close to this model, as does the California School Improvement Program.

Some commentators[1] allege that Title I, through its "packaged management approaches" which tend to be viewed as a "complete road map of innovation" has discouraged program participants from developing flexibility to perceive or cope with problems in a non-standard way or to respond to what is unique in each situation.

The recent O.E.C.D. review of programs for the disadvantaged in the United States[2] recommended a pattern of funding which would pass initiative to the school. It saw the equalisation of basic school funding as the major task, followed by a consolidation of federal school programs for the disadvantaged which would raise total resources above average levels in schools where there was an above average concentration of "disadvantaged" students and leave action to be designed at school level within the context of a total school program. There appears to be considerable support at all educational levels in the United

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1. Robert Gottel in Michael Timpane (ed), The Federal Interest in Financing Schools, Ballinger Publishing Company, Camb. Mass. 1978

2. P. Karmel (Chairman) Review of Educational Policy in the United States, O.E.C.D. 1979

States for a consolidation of categorical programs and greater reliance on local initiative in the form of their implementation. State programs for the disadvantaged have already been consolidated into an Economic Impact Program, and within the School Improvement Program emphasis is being placed on initial analysis of the total school program, giving particular attention to the special needs of low achieving students, and subsequently allocating parts of the action planned to appropriate funding sources. Whether equalisation needs to precede consolidation may be arguable. Whether consolidation will be politically acceptable, either to legislatures or to groups who identify with particular categorical programs is an open question, whose answer may be expected to depend, at least partly on the trust placed in professionals to carry out specific mandates without separate accountability for the use of funds and demonstration that those funds have been applied exclusively to particular students.

It is sometimes said that "the feds cannot influence anything important" because of the tenuous links between funding and action at school level. But if funds are provided in a way which generates and supports thoughtful local initiative, this is not necessarily the case. Irrespective of the degree and nature of its influence on what actually happens in classrooms, federal funding has considerable educational impact. Both Title I and the Disadvantaged Schools Program have re-ordered the educational agenda in ways which force attention to the unequal way in which schools have served different sections of the population. Title I, because of its higher political profile, has done this more effectively than has the Australian program, but the inequalities of U.S. society are also greater and racial problems both larger in scale and more visible. Both programs have placed a sociological perspective on a map dominated by considerations of individual psychology. They have challenged the acceptance of a high failure rate in the most basic educational

achievements. The American program has brought about equal basic funding among schools within districts, and has heightened attention to inequalities among districts in doing so. Through it large numbers of minority group parents have been employed in the schools as aides, an influx which has at least marginally changed the social character of schools as institutions. Title I has informed parents - in a way which the Australian program often conspicuously has not - of their rights under the program and of the kinds of questions they should ask of authorities. It has served as a rallying point for minority organisations and raised expectations about what their children have the right to expect from schools.

Where the battle to establish the new priorities is long drawn out, as it has been in the United States (where it is also complicated by the intrusion of the issue of equal basic funding), tight federal regulation will be required for a period. The suggestion now is that that period is over and that patterns of funding more supportive of local responsibility and initiative, such as that recommended by the O.E.C.D. review team, would now improve the educational effectiveness of the program in schools and classrooms without detracting from the social priority it represents.

School or pupils as the unit?

The school is the unit of funding and action in the Disadvantaged Schools Program, individually designated students within the school in Title I. This difference is largely explained by reference to the rationales of the two programs, as already outlined. Broadly stated, the American program assumes that if one could improve the early school performance of the children from low income families, the chances of improving their longer term educational achievement would be greater and

their adult economic position thereby be improved. It further assumes that the way to do this is through supplementary instruction in the basic skills, conducted separately from the main program of the school. The Australian program does not assume either that the means of improving performance are known or can universally be prescribed; its objectives are less specific, its hope that through engaging the commitment of people in and served by the school to improved educational experience and outcomes for the students in particular school programs will be devised which interact more positively with life in those communities, responding to its pressures and building on its resources and strengths. It is not assumed that major social changes can be effected through action in schools, except to the degree that such action raises the competence and confidence of people to participate in directing them and in managing their own lives. The Australian program entertains the possibility that the schools as institutions may be in need of a changed orientation if they are to be equally serviceable to students of differing backgrounds.

Some positive arguments for using the school as the unit of funding and action have been implied in the discussion of forms of federal regulation. These arguments highlight the importance of co-operative analysis, goal setting and action in school improvement and professional learning. Action focussed on a predefined group of students assumes that what will be most effective is an add-on which puts the major part of the school program beyond question. Yet if it is in fact the case that the whole institutional orientation is in need of change if even the targeted students are to get something of a more positive nature from their schooling, this may be misconceived.

A simple illustration may be taken from Australian experience. Before 1975 federal funding for students of non-English speaking background (the only federal funding "targeted" to particular students within the school in Australia) could only

be used to support special services unique to such students. The result was very like that seen in Title I. Withdrawal English classes taught by specially funded teachers were the standard response to the conditions of funding. This, however, was found to have certain counter-productive features. The work of the special teachers was not co-ordinated with that of teachers in the regular classroom where most second language learners spent most of the school week. The regular class teacher often took the view that nothing special needed to be done in the regular program to assist second language learners, since their problems were being "fixed" elsewhere. The major program remained as non-ethnic as before, even in schools where an overwhelming majority of students was drawn from non-English speaking backgrounds. Even with changed conditions of funding, change has been slow, but it is now more widely recognised that the school response to an ethnically diverse population affects every aspect of the institution and the school program, and that without such widely inclusive support measures ethnic minority students will remain outsiders to the school. This is a whole school issue, not one confined to students of non-Anglo background. Many schools continue to use pull-out for migrant students, but the pressure is to regard this as one alternative and that, even if followed, it needs to be supplemented by changes in the whole school program planned jointly with the decision to use it.

In general, it is one thing for the professionals involved to decide, within the focus of a total school program, and integrated with it, to withdraw some students for limited periods of intensive instruction. It is quite another for the group to be externally defined for the "treatment" to be chosen for administrative convenience rather than as part of an educational strategy. The large number of categorical programs now operating in American schools fragment the school as an institution and categorise individual students in what may be

destructive ways. A single school may be operating ten or so categorical programs, each with its own committee of advice (a device which also fragments parents), its own detailed regulations and accountability requirements. The same students may qualify under a number of categories, without any coherent intention and with unknown degrees of overlap.

An exclusive concentration on individual student benefits encourages the idea that the only way to get appropriate attention is to proliferate categories. If the slow learners get something special, so then should the gifted; a plethora of priorities cancels each other out; every category is in competition for benefits with every other. Perhaps more dangerously, such a concentration can erode the whole concept of public schooling. If education is seen only as a service to individuals, the notion that they might with greater satisfaction command it themselves through having their choices funded in an open educational market is not far away. Where, then, has the idea of common citizenship and mutual responsibility gone?

Segregated action directed at low achieving students within the school, however good its intention, publicly brands the students concerned as deficient in a particular dimension giving that dimension a status above every other strength the student may possess. It gives a credence to standardised testing which may be unwarranted and continuously reinforces the ranking of students and individual competition as against mutual help in the learning environment. Evidence about the long-term learning gains from pull-out remedial assistance would need to be stronger than it is to justify routine and widespread adoption of the practice. Where pull-out is not practiced, the absurdity of excluding some students from the use of equipment or the services of personnel categorically funded is particularly evident. It is equalled by the absurdity of pull-out where almost all students in a school are classified as educationally disadvantaged.

Whole school programs avoid invidious distinctions among students and parents. They allow the content and mode of learning of the whole school to be adapted to the total group of students present and to the conditions of life which the local population shares. They encourage the development of links between the school and local people, the use of local resources outside the school within the school and the development of the school as an institution which makes a contribution to the life of the community itself. Where the range of local employment is limited, unemployment rates high and significant numbers of low income single parents present, they allow the curriculum to respond to those conditions too, without singling out individual students. Because they encourage teachers to learn about the local community they broaden the social understanding of professionals and their respect for people facing conditions of life with which the existing school curriculum either fails to interact at all, or which it implicitly denigrates.

This is not to say that there are no difficulties about school based programs. Two separate issues are involved. The first relates to the provision of funds, the second to the school program itself. In the Australian program, schools are either "in or out", they either qualify or they do not qualify for funds under the program, according to the degree of concentration in them of low S.E.S. families. Some schools demonstrably qualify - particularly those serving areas of welfare housing. But the population is not neatly segregated by socio-economic level, and as the margin of inclusion is reached there is very little to distinguish schools which qualify from those which don't. This is a considerable source of tension in the Australian program, particularly as the ranking of schools can be dramatically affected by the factors selected to identify them and the weightings given those factors. There is some turnover of marginal schools, but many would like the turnover to be greater, particularly as it

is claimed that the processes of the program, involving participatory decision making, critical analysis of school offerings and a study of the local community, are as important in school improvement as are the resources provided. Some claim that once these processes are established, improvement is self-generating. It is, however, also the case that personnel employed under the program are usually indispensible to action taken. The fact that the program is limited to selected schools gives it an entity which is important to the degree of success it has. Staff compete to get into some schools in the program where it was in the past difficult to hold good staff. The liveliness of the best schools in the program often contrasts strongly with routinised operations elsewhere. A widely voiced criticism of the Australian program, however, is that children from low S.E.S. families and low achievers are present in all schools, and that in absolute terms the numbers of such students excluded from the program may be considerably greater than those in it, and that many students in disadvantaged schools could not, on either social or educational grounds be described as disadvantaged. This criticism is answered by maintaining that equal basic provision for schools assumes an average social and educational mix, so that only abnormal concentrations should attract extra funds, and by appeal to evidence that concentration of low S.E.S. students constitutes an educational disadvantage over and above the influence of individual circumstances. The evidence on this point is much disputed, but a recent Swedish longitudinal study gives new support to the contention.

It is possible, especially if funds provided are in total relatively large, to spread programs more widely, so diluting the uniqueness of participation and the social priorities represente Title I covers a high proportion of schools, grading benefits to them according to the absolute number of low income families served. It would be possible to maintain this grading in the distribution

of funds and to consolidate categorical programs into whole school improvement programs. This would require a changed view about "significant levels of service", which in Title I is assumed to require around $200 per year for selected pupils, as well as more open initiative in schools about how funds are used. How far processes and how far funds are crucial in improving the effectiveness of schooling in poorer communities is a question which is crucial to such decisions - and about which we know little.

Apart from the distribution of funds issue, the other difficulty about school based programs is that they require faith at the political level that teachers and parents will take seriously the need to find more effective ways to success in formal learning among the inevitably more diffuse goals for improvement among which they are given freedom to choose. A requirement that formal learning improvement be one of the goals of action and one of the terms of local evaluation of action could to a degree overcome this difficulty.

There are good arguments, however, for concentrating both programs in fewer schools, confining them to those where a very high proportion of low S.E.S. and/or low performing children are concentrated. This would concentrate resources in ways which could give better clues to what critical level of resources makes a difference and highlight the social priority of the programs more strongly. The level of supplementary funding is very low in the Australian program, with its present spread of schools. In Title I there seems to be some logical absurdity in defining "educational disadvantage" as performance below the median in normed tests.

Are improved scores the aim?

It may well be that the attention given to skills training in Australian schools is inadequate. There can be no doubt of the American obsession with it. This is not confined to Title I, but closely associated with the minimum competency requirements legislated in most states. Without entering into the complex argument about what standardised tests can measure, it may be said that there are clear dangers in laying too great an emphasis on them in evaluating the effects of schooling on the progress of learning. While it is possible through intensive attention to low achievers marginally to improve test scores, at least on a short term basis, the improvements achieved are not likely to be such as will change the relative ranking of the low achieving group as a whole. If the concern is to improve the income earning capacity of the students concerned, only a change in rank position can do that while unemployment persists. If the desire is primarily to improve the chances of subsequent learning success, irrespective of economic outcomes, the same argument holds. If more sophisticated learning is something more than an accretion of skills, but a creative act of mental transformation in which the learner has to have both the desire and the confidence to engage, then we have no evidence that isolated attention to skills will advance it. There is now some reason to believe that while performance, measured in standardised ways can be improved by specific attention to what is tested, a plateau is reached beyond which some more active initiation by the learner is required. This initiative might reasonably be thought to be associated with what point he or she sees in the task which skills are the means of mastering. They are never the task itself, unless the education system chooses to frame up its goals in that way.

The Australian program defines competence in a broad and vague way which reflects the many-dimensional goals of education itself. It is not assumed that what happens can simply be measured. It may well be that within this vagueness formal learning improvements should take a more central place as an aspect of competence in negotiating the world, understanding oneself and others, willingness to take individual and collective initiative and responsibility. It is interesting that both the section of the N.I.E. study of Title I which was concerned with its instructional dimensions[1] and a Stanford Research Institute study reported that evaluation in the terms practised in Title I had little flow back into action in the school, being seen by teachers as a means of satisfying external authorities rather than as a guide to their own future action. Teachers generally believed that spin-offs resulting from more concentrated attention to individual students, from the presence of more adults in the school and from greater parental interest brought benefits for students which could not be measured in terms of the evaluation. The teachers' goals, in other words, extended beyond the basic skills improvement to which so much official concern was directed.

The age coverage of programs

Ninety-nine per cent of students participating in Title I are in elementary schools, most of them in the early years of schooling. Seventy per cent of students in D.S.P. schools are primary. This concentration reflects concern that those students who enter secondary schools with low performance levels are unlikely, given the nature of secondary schools, to participate successfully in programs there. It is also supported by notions about critical stages of development and by evidence

1. Perspectives on the Instructional Dimensions Study, a Supplementary Report from the National Institute of Education, D.H.E.W., Washington, D.C. Nov. 1978.

such as that advanced by Bloom and many other psychologists, that the major part of cognitive development takes place at early ages. It seems to follow that if the battle is not won then, it never will be.

The heavy concentration of Title I on the early years of elementary schooling is now being questioned. Curiously, there has been no follow-up into secondary school of students who participated in the program in their early years. Challenging the received wisdom about critical periods, a report by the Stanford Research Institute[1] concludes that "Experience now suggests at least that intelligence is less susceptible to permanent influence in the early years than many researchers have previously believed". It also asserts that "there is much research to suggest that new intellectual capacities develop during adolescence that can make the acquisition of both basic and applied skills much easier and more productive than at any earlier stage".

Whether this is the case or not, there are good reasons for wanting expanded attention to secondary students in programs for the disadvantaged. In areas where students from low income families are congregated, unemployment rates among young people are unusually high, and may be expected to continue so. Those who get jobs are likely to find little intrinsic satisfaction in them. This discouragement suggests a need for special action in the school to enable young people to understand the situation and what options they have in it. The orientations of Australian and U.S. secondary schools are sufficiently different to make it difficult to make an overarching comment. Australian secondary schools are still strongly academically oriented towards tertiary selection and are predicated on a high early drop-out rate, roughly

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1. Meredith A. Larson and Freya E. Dittman, Compensatory Education and Early Adolescence, D.H.E.W., Washington D.C. May 1975

half the age cohort being out of school by age 16. America has attempted to hold young people out of the labour market longer, offering greater within school choices and allowing choices which can enable students to avoid activities in which reading, writing and calculation play a central role. Such factors must come into any analysis. But it would be true to say that nowhere has the secondary school yet learned to associate serious intellectual activity with practical pursuits or with issues of concern to young people entering a fast-changing world where many of them find no productive and respected place.

In commenting on the two programs at secondary level, it is important to take into account the wide range of U.S. programs for disadvantaged youth, a situation which has no parallel in Australia. More adventurous programs at secondary level in the Disadvantaged Schools Program are multiplied many times in the U.S. - but not under the wings of Title I. One Tasmanian school in the Disadvantaged Schools Program, for example, involved year 9 students who negotiated a loan and sub-contracted the building of a house, which they subsequently sold and in which much of the labour as well as the planning was done by them. The experience developed a wide range of skills equally important with the narrow definitions which schools usually put upon basics, and the students concerned kept up with the ordinary curriculum, learning central concepts through the real task of the housebuilding. Experience based career education projects in the United States are one example among many of the integration of learning into the "real world". Such approaches seem to have more to offer than a large-scale continuation of Title I into the secondary schools as remedial basic skills programs.

The notion of disadvantage

There are real problems with the notion of disadvantage. It may be used in an absolute or relative sense. In its absolute sense it requires the setting up of some criterion level of condition (as in the U.S. income measure or as in minimum competency legislation). When this criterion level refers to school achievement the objections to it and the potential negative educational effects of it are well rehearsed. When it refers to social condition, a legitimate response is to say that if low income, or lack of work or the negative features of a proportion of jobs, or other factors capable of measurement is the problem, then the problem can only be answered by changed social arrangements rather than school action is the appropriate response. Because programs for the disadvantaged focus on the victims rather than the socially constructed disadvantaging circumstances, they may encourage the view that if the individuals affected could be changed in some way, the problem would be solved.

When used in the relative sense, there remains the problem of setting up the criteria according to which people and groups will be compared. In educational terms, the comparisons made are usually in terms of traditional school outcomes and the relative chances of reaching through education some particular point in the social structure from various social origins. While there are good arguments for attempting to increase equality of opportunity in this sense, excessive concentration on the prospects of upward social mobility for those may positively disqualify the mass of the group which has experienced the underside of the coin of hierarchy in conditions of upbringing from coping constructively with the kind of social futures they may realistically expect to enter. It also continuously reinforces the notion of hierarchy itself and personalises failure, as well as unlaterally defining it.

It is thus easy to mount theoretical attacks on programs for the disadvantaged, who may from many points of view be seen to be responding realistically to the world as it presents itself to them, and to the role of the education system in that world. Yet, given that equality of condition as distinct from equality of opportunity does not command wide support in either U.S. or Australian society and that generations of children will come and go while we wait for Godot, it is irresponsible to say that nothing can be done in the public schools, which, after all, are also part of social arrangements, to widen the options, both in paid work and in other aspects of life for those whose conditions of upbringing are most limiting of options. There will be disagreement about how to do this, requiring open experimentation in which every effort is made to engage the people involved in seeking solutions, which there is little reason to believe will be everywhere the same. That is a strong argument for school based rather than pupil specific action, particularly as engagement with the problem itself increases the perceived power over circumstances which is part of the solution. It may be necessary to live with the ambiguities of the term disadvantaged, or with those of any substitute for it, if the notion of special action in schools to raise the achievement, the social competence and the social power of the least privileged is seen as a worthy aim of policy. Both Title I and the Disadvantaged Schools Program exemplify these ambiguities. The American program, after sharing out funds on social criteria, moves to the educational criteria of low performanc levels in its definition of disadvantage. It is therefore understandably subject to pressures to define it as a low achievers' program, per se, omitting the intervening social criteria. The Australian program uses socio-economic criteria selected for association with low average school success and participation yet defines objectives in ways which do not concentrate narrowly on improved performance. In its turn, and because of the way the program operates, it is subject to pressures to become a general school improvement program.